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On 25th May 2013, the death of the virtual veteran Léon Vivien (virtually occurring in 1915) was announced on his Facebook page. Over 800 people wrote a message on his page, most expressing their true sadness at learning of Léon's death, to whom some felt extremely close, even to the point of tears upon reading the news. The message posted on Léon Vivien's page by the Meaux Museum of the Great War bears witness to the scale of the emotion which this virtual soldier was able to generate: 'The images and words had gradually created invisible links between you and him. Links so strong that thousands of you cheered the birth of his son and cried on the day of his death. The bullet which killed him on a grey morning in May proved that a projectile one hundred years away can also strike you in the very heart.'

Over several months in spring 2013, on an almost daily basis, the DDB communication agency published online messages posted by the character Léon Vivien, devised on behalf of the Meaux Museum of the Great War (north-east of Paris). The story, illustrated by a large number of (audio-)visual documents, is based on the museum's substantial collection. Just as on any friend's Facebook page, Internet users reacted to Vivien's messages by commenting day after day. All in all, nearly 7,000 messages were posted by followers and 60,000 people became 'fans' of Léon's page.

While most internet users recognised the fictional nature of this Facebook World War experience, some approached it as a true story, such as this internet user who lambasted a comment which claimed that it was fictional: 'These words bewilder me. He is not a fictional character!!!! This is a person who lived through the First World War and wrote about and photographed what he saw... When you don't know what the stakes are, it's best to keep quiet!!!!' Others asked where Léon Vivien had been buried... While these misunderstandings

were a relatively uncommon occurrence, it is undeniable that this Facebook experience managed to generate a singularly close relationship with the internet users who followed him on a daily basis.

Several months later, the Caen Mémorial created the bilingual French-English story for Facebook and Twitter of the fictional G.I. Louis Castel, who participated in the D-Day landings. In 2015, the same Mémorial launched the story of little Suzon with the aim of heightening children's awareness of the Second World War. Taking into account the success of these initiatives, it seems a fair guess that they are merely the first of a developing trend.

In this article, we suggest analysing the phenomenon of docufiction on social websites in two steps. We will first examine the engineering of social networks which have been conditioning enunciation. We will then apply a semiopragmatic model which takes account of the 'promise' and allows for the analysis of these docufictions on four different levels: profilmic, plastic, iconic and diegetic.

1. Some Facebook's mechanics

In order to create a narrative to which internet users can react, the developers of docufictions on social websites may use the asset of these sites' specific mechanism. José Van Dijck (2013: 65) reminds us that 'sharing, friending and liking are powerful ideological concepts whose impact reaches beyond Facebook proper into all corners of culture, affecting the very fabric of sociality.' Let us examine in some detail these three issues. Firstly, the propensity of Facebook to share content through networking can raise awareness of Léon Vivien's page. Indeed, when one or more friends have 'liked' the page, it appears in the top right hand corner of our personal Facebook, amongst the recommended pages. Facebook's 'tribal functioning'

(Benoît 2013: 82, our translation), in which content is shared between peers, thus determines access to information, at the risk of standardising the types of content which are diffused. Coming into contact with these docufiction characters is therefore more a question of our friends' affinities than our own areas of interest.

Secondly, Taina Bucher (2013: 489) identifies the way in which Facebook acts as a 'friendship maker', in which an individual is not left alone but rather encouraged to extend his network (by suggesting 'people you may know', etc.). The quality of friendships on Facebook is measured by the number of friends and the content which we post on it. Social relationships thus take the form of 'algorithmic friendship(s)' (Bucher 2013: 489), conditioned, as the name suggests, by the algorithms Facebook uses to determine which data is visible.

Van Dijck observes the development of a narrative means of organising posted information, which perfectly corresponds with the logbook-style tales which these docufictions offer us:

The gradual shift from user-centered connectedness to owner-centered connectivity brought along a change in the organization of F's content from a *database* structure into a *narrative* structure. In the platform's early years, content was generally organized around user connections, news and friends updates, and active discussions. Database *of* users and *for* users. [...] Over the course of several years, the platform's owners clearly strove toward more uniformity in data input and began to introduce specific narrative features in the interface – a transformation that culminated into the implementation of Timeline in 2011. The resulting narrative is a construction in hindsight, a retroactive chronological ordering of life events. [...] The narrative presentation gives each member page the look and feel of a magazine – a slick publication, with you as the protagonist. With the introduction of

Timeline, Facebook has crept deeper into the texture of life, its narrative principles imitating proven conventions of storytelling, thus binding users even more tightly to the fabric that keeps it connected.’ (Van Dijck 2013: 54-55)

Thirdly, Facebook can be considered as a ‘kissland’ (Benoît 2012: 47, our translation), in which a cool and relativistic attitude is favoured, leaving little room for differences of opinion. The social network offers different tools to help nourish friendships, focusing for the main part on the phatic function of communication: the ‘like’ button (whose ‘dislike’ counterpart does not exist) and the now defunct means of ‘poking’ someone, which amounts to virtually entering into physical contact with someone, are two well-known examples. This may explain why more than 60,000 people liked Vivien’s page (without necessarily following his adventures) and also why so many internet users bothered to ‘like’ his messages rather than comment on them. As Barry Schnitt, Facebook’s director of corporate communications and public policy has stated, Facebook favours empathetic contact, ‘by making the world more open and connected, we’re expanding understanding between people and making the world a more empathetic place.’ (quoted in Kirkpatrick 2009)

This empathy for Léon Vivien or Louis Castel is proven in a kind of interpersonal relationship with the internet user, who develops a feeling of intimacy and closeness to the virtual soldier. This would be all the more valid for older internet users who tend to maintain interpersonal interactions on Facebook, rather than more collective relationships, for example via messages aimed at all of their friends. (MacAndrew and Sun Jeong 2012: 2360).

It is important to note that little Suzon, unlike Vivien, Castel or any member of Facebook, does not write directly on her page; she uses the intermediary of a diary, to whom she

addresses her writing, which is published on Facebook. As the internet user is not the main addressee of her words, the feeling of interpersonal closeness is diminished.

Moreover, the experienced intimacy and the authenticity of internet users' reactions to the positive and negative events experience by Vivien and Castel can also be explained by the fact that Facebook is a 'nonymous' environment (Zhao et al. 2008: 1818): the individuals (are supposed to) interact with the other members of the website via their real name, which can obviously have consequences for the nature of the interaction and the performance of identity. For Zhao et al., the nonymous online world emerges as a third type of environment, between totally anonymous websites and nonymous offline worlds. In nonymous online environments,

People may tend to express what has been called the 'hoped-for possible selves' (Yurchisim et al., 2005). [...] Hoped-for possible selves are socially desirable identities an individual would like to establish and believes that they can be established given the right conditions. [...] They are 'socially desirable' or norm-confirming, but that does not necessarily mean that they are not true selves: even though they are not yet fully actualized offline, they can have a real impact on the individuals. (Zhao et al. 2008: 1818-1832)

McAndrew and Sun Jeong's findings, among others, confirm Zhao et al.'s hypothesis, as they consider that 'Facebook usage is heavily driven by a desire for social interaction' (McAndrew and Sun Jeong 2012: 2360) rather than for impression management. As a result, the performance of identities tends to show accurate reflections of their personality rather than idealized selves.

Facebook's nonymity is quite specific, as some members prefer using a pseudonym instead of their real name, for obvious privacy reasons, a phenomenon which Facebook is actively trying to prevent.

2. Docufiction on the web: towards a semiotic model

The difference between fiction and non-fiction has generated considerable debate, revived by the emergence over time of so-called 'hybrid' forms. Lioult (2004), who in particular broaches questions from the perspective of the semiotics of cinema, considers it important to move past the paradigm of the confusion of genres. He builds upon Ponech, in whose opinion while the barriers between fiction and non-fiction may be fixed, the intentions in a mixed work 'in the hybrid, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction does not break down. All that dissolve are somebody's inhibitions against making in which both assertive and fiction-making illocutionary force are signaled.' (Ponech 1999: 158)

In docufictions on the web, not only are the intentions mixed, but they also subvert the traditional hierarchy between fiction and non-fiction. They intensify the reversal observed by Isabelle Veyrat-Masson in televised docufictions: 'The role of fiction is completely reversed with respect to its primary function and its initial recreational usage: we have moved from recreation to re-creation. [...] In docufiction, archives are illuminated by fiction; the traditional relationships between the two regimes of truth are reversed.' (2008: 120-126, our translation)

In 1999, Shaeffer wrote that 'of all the currently known mimetic representation devices, cinema is without doubt that which most easily manages to produce effects of this type' (quoted in Lioult 2004: 31, our translation), which is to say perceptive illusions and shared recreational pretenses, created in order to entertain, rather than trick, the spectator. Nowadays,

docufictions on the web question this statement. Indeed, it would appear that they allow for the development of perceptive illusions and shared recreational pretenses which are at least as effective as those exploited in films, due to the mechanism of the social networks which host them (cf. *supra*) and their particular narrative strategies. In an attempt to understand them, we would put forward the following semiotic model.

2.1. The promise

Before analysing the Facebook page as such, let us study its ‘promise’, in François Jost’s words (2009: 48): to what ‘world’ (real, fictional or playful) do the producers relate it? In other words, is an authentic, fictional or playful relation to the events promised?

In order to answer this question, let us briefly examine the press release published when the Léon Vivien page was launched. The 10 April 2013 press release which launched the experience includes formulations which refer both to the categories of real and fiction.

The release insists on the ‘patronage by a historian’ and defines this experience as a ‘formidable instrument of knowledge and collective memory’ (our translation). The fictional dimension is also referenced in the first press release, when the communication agency states that it ‘imagined what a young Frenchman might have posted on a day-to-day basis if the social network had existed a century ago,’ with a ‘main character.’

Beyond the formulation which refers to the two registers of the real and the fictional, the ambiguity of the press release also lies in the French expression meaning ‘genuine human story,’ which functions almost like an oxymoron as it refers to seemingly contradictory ideas, ‘genuine’ referring to the historical truth, and ‘story’ to the fictional conventions.

If the promise is a bit ambiguous, it has also evolved over time.

The last message written on the Facebook page (on 24 May 2013), which is written by the Museum (and no longer by Vivien), mentions more modest objectives, which focus on its emotional charge: ‘This page had no other goal than making you feel and share, as closely as possible to the human, what the soldiers of [19]14 could have lived, as well as the relatives remained in the back. Your thousands of comments, coming straight from the heart, showed us that we succeeded’ (Musée de la Grande Guerre de Meaux on Léon Vivien’s Facebook page, our translation).

Franck Moulin, the Communication director of the Caen Mémorial, insists on the accuracy of the Louis Castel narrative, which is built upon several true stories: ‘His story is a puzzle of true stories drawn from testimonies which we have in our archives or in books. The historian Emmanuel Thiébot wrote the historical plot from beginning to end, to which is added a dramatic fictional layer written to give the character body.’ (quoted in *L’Express* and AFP 2013, our translation) He also affirms that ‘There is a Romanesque layer on top of the Story, but nothing is invented.’ (quoted in Le Cain 2013) In terms of Castel’s adventure, the Mémorial also highlights the shared emotion at spending several weeks at the G.I.’s sides: ‘Thank You. Thank you to everyone who has followed Louis Castel, the GI who displayed such strong enthusiasm in his commitment to the Liberation of France and Europe. [...] Louis Castel could not have existed without your encouragement and your interest in history. There were over 27,300 of you following Louis on Facebook, and more than 7,700 on Twitter, showing your solidarity and your gratitude every day. In “liking”, commenting, and sharing, you have contributed to this adventure.’ (Mémorial de Caen on Louis Castel’s Facebook page).

For Vivien and Castel, the issue is not about its function as learning device but more about a touching, immediate, and lived experience.

As we can see, the promise made to the Internet user is plural, meandering between knowledge device, emotional experience, and fictional entertainment.

2.2. Four levels of analysis

In Lioult's opinion, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction can be found in three¹ pairs of characteristics (2004: 150):

Non-fiction	Fiction
Inclusion of 1 st order reality, with objectively recognisable properties	Inclusion of 2 nd order reality, made up of representations of 1 st order reality
Afilmic treatment of this reality	Profilmic treatment of this reality
Indexicality of icons	Emblematic of iconicity

According to Lioult, each pole focuses on the construction of meaning with its own characteristics but *exploits* the characteristics of the other pole. We have mentioned the hypothesis that the barriers between genres are fixed but their creative intentions are mixed. Indeed, in this case, we find characteristics unique to each pole but creative intentions which navigate between the two, using the final purpose of the other pole. Docufictions certainly fall under the heading of fiction, if only due to the fictional nature of the character relating events. We will see that online docufictions particularly intensify the practice of using non-fiction characteristics. In order to do so, we suggest using a four-level analysis model which was put forward by Dominique Château (1986) for cinema then taken up by François Jost (2004) and

¹ He adds the pairing of analogue and digital meaning, which we do not consider here.

Muriel Hanot (2002) for the television: profilmic, plastic, iconic and diegetic. The analysis is carried out in this order, with each level deepening the questions raised by the previous ones.

This model allows us to take account of both the visual documents which accompany the posts as well as the actual messages and a small number of sound documents.

2.2.1. Level I: profilmic

In short, profilmic can be defined as the scenographic layout of the elements to be photographed, before shooting. This involves determining whether the layout is trying to create the *effects of the past* or *of the present* (Hanot 2002: 34-40, our translation).

In an effort to offer internet users a trip back in time, the enunciator will exploit the *effect of the past* of ‘retroactively dated’ (Hanot 2002: 34, our translation) archival images. This process can also be observed in the use of musical sound clips, which have an indisputably ‘old-fashioned’ (Hanot 2002: 38, our translation) effect in this day and age. Thus the enunciator highlights the effect of the past which characterises these documents.

In addition to the use of existing archives, the enunciator will construct certain pictures. The profilmic aspect (the characters’ poses, their appearance, the background of photos of objects, etc.) is in this case reconstructed by convention. With Léon Vivien, as with Louis Castel, we find photographs which personalise objects and integrate them into the fiction, like in the examples below.



Image 1 : Picture accompanying Louis Castel's post from 31st December 1943: 'New Year's Eve. 'Seconds, come and get it!'. Tonight, we will be allowed double rations and a "special dessert": cookies!' © Mémorial de Caen



Picture 2: Photograph accompanying Léon Vivien's post from 9th November 1914: 'Get dressed, team! I'm going back to my room to prepare my bag for a military march which will take place tomorrow morning.' (Our translation) © DDB Paris

While the photographs created today recall the photographic practices of the time, the photos of small objects in Vivien's and Castel's hand and photographed with the other hand, as well as some of Vivien's self-portraits, rather recall current day practices, more similar to 'selfies' than the customs of the beginning and middle of the twentieth century. The slightly quirky nature of these photographs means that a particular knowledge of photographic art is required

for it to be identified; this is not an issue for non-expert internet users, who do not notice the generated anachronism.

In the absence of adequate existing documents, the Caen Mémorial has sometimes taken the decision to resort to drawings for characters' Facebook profiles and for various illustrations accompanying their posts (see below). While they reproduce the profilmic aspect of the time, they can of course not be equated with authentic documents.

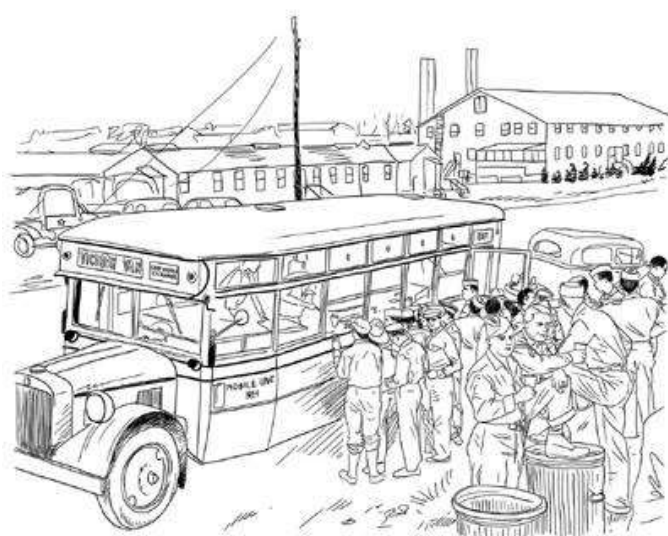


Image 3: Drawing accompanying Louis Castel's post from 9th December 1943: 'Another few days at the Kilmer camp. Milk, always milk! Personally I would prefer a good côtes-du-Rhône, a vintage Burgundy or some Bordeaux!' © Mémorial de Caen



Image 4: Picture accompanying Suzon's post from 2nd October 1940: 'Dear diary, it's the beginning of a new school term! [...] When I come back from school with a muddy blouse, aunty grumbles at me because I'm dirty. Well, I'll leave you because I've got a load of homework for tomorrow and afterwards I've still got my chores on the farm! No quiet life for me...' (Our translation) © Mémorial de Caen

These documents reinforce the fictional nature of the tale.

2.2.2. Level II: plastic

'Indexes of materiality' (Hanot 2002: 46, our translation) are taken into account in the plastic analysis of the documents: black and white marks, yellowing and/or deterioration of photographs, sound static, etc.

The developers of *Léon Vivien* decided to harmonise all of the photographs by using the same black and white patina. The various origins of the documents are also hidden so as to favour a coherent global narrative; the plastic harmony gives the impression that all of the photographs come from the same device. The care taken with the plastic dimension demonstrates that the enunciator favours *transparency* rather than the *unveiling* of the medium, in an attempt to

support the aesthetically beautiful aspect of the tale. The purported spontaneity of Facebook posts does not show itself through (falsely) natural brute plasticity. The combination of a *profilmic past effect* and a *past effect of materiality* creates an ‘effect of historicization’ (Hanot 2002: 52, our translation) unique to archives and reconstructions. The profilmic and plastic modification of the original documents is hardly visible from a quick reading; the internet user is put in a ‘quasi-perceptive’ position (Schaeffer quoted in Jost 2004: 33, our translation) which invites us to observe the image as a whole without examining the details. Moreover, Facebook’s momentum, whereby posts rapidly follow each other, reinforces this quick, global reading.

On the other hand, the developers of Louis Castel and Suzon have chosen to preserve the original, plastic characteristics of the photographs. The latter originate from various collections; some are available in online databases. The sought-after past effect of materiality is thus strictly authentic. The choice implies differences in the black and white patina and variations of grains between some of the photographs on these Facebook pages. As is the case with drawings, narrative coherence can thus be somewhat undermined.

While photographs are sometimes harmonised, other visual documents (newspaper extracts, military documents, etc.) from the three docufictions conserve their own particular indexes of past materiality. This plastic element contributes to the effect of historicization sought by the enunciator.

2.2.3. Level III: iconic

At the iconic level, we investigate the extent to which the reality put forward constitutes a reality which flaunts itself or a reality which erases its reference marks. In other words, are we faced with a *true* or *realistic* presentation of events? In these Facebook docufictions, the

original self of the enunciation is not real; the enunciator is a fictional character who therefore cannot support his remarks in the ‘extra-fictional’ world. Against this background, the relationship with events can only be *realistic*, not real.

These docufictions offer us, according to the meaning of Barthes, a somewhat *mythical* way of handling world conflicts: Vivien’s experience unfolds in an undetermined space and time; dates and places are not given. Lioult (2004: 150) provides an apt summary of the iconic issue when he states that cinema most often assumes the function of parable or allegory, while documentaries demand that space and time, characters, etc. represent *themselves*. This is confirmed in docufictions on the internet: events captured in photographs are inserted into the story but mainly act as archetypes of the war they narrate, beyond their *hic et nunc* origin and beyond the created fiction. It is particularly due to this content delivery that docufictions may lay claim to a pedagogical function, as a device to teach ‘the war’.

Various photographs used in the tale of Louis Castel de-contextualise the profilmic elements, thus erasing historical references, and re-contextualise them in a fictional universe. For example, actors and actresses watching a softball match in New York (in particular Paul Robeson and José Ferrer) become ‘Jack’ and ‘Jacqueline’ in the story, who have come to support Castel at a baseball match.



Image 5: Picture accompanying Louis Castel's post from 20th December 1943: 'We were not the Yankees but what a game! To support me, even playing baseball, there is no one better than Jack and Jacqueline.' © Everett Collection Historical / Alamy

The complexity of analysing the characters' posts arises in particular from the fact that they collectively include the effects of 'fictionality' and realism: on the one hand, the internal ocularization and focus of Vivien, Castel and Suzon emphasises the fictional dimension; the war reaches us via the subjectivity of a fictional character. On the other, the posts exploit the indexical strength of these archival photographs. The internet user is faced with 'indexical icons' (Schaeffer quoted in Lioult 2004: 64, our translation) which maintain an impression of past events but which are also coded according to the photographic practices of the time and especially today's symbolic representations of war. The tension between iconic, indexical and symbolic functions encourages multifaceted interpretations of the photographs. Vivien's enunciator stresses the indexical nature of these photographs – they consist of real footprints today preserved in the place of authority occupied by the museum – but erases their specificity in order to present them in a symbolic manner. In contrast, the Caen Mémorial has kept visible references and copyrights on most of the photographs, stated in the same way in the document, and has also preserved the explanations accompanying various photos. These

references have been deleted in Vivien's case, once again in order to homogenise the tale and to give the impression that the pictures originate from the same camera. Thus the fiction uses the contextualisation of archival images to different degrees in order to create an effect of realism and authenticity.

The stakes are different when we consider photographs created nowadays, without the internet user being aware of this: in this case, when icons are presented as evidence, they become 'deceptive' (Jost 2004: 34, our translation).

2.2.4. Level IV: diegetic

At diegetic level, the questioning raised by the profilmic, plastic and iconic levels is deepened in order to investigate the way in which a tale is set up (or not): is the editing transparent, continuous and supportive of the tale? Or, on the contrary, is it unveiled and discontinuous, supportive of an indexical approach to the events? There is no doubt that in the case of docufictions, narrative logic wins hands-down. For example, we have shown how Léon Vivien's Facebook page shows analogies with Hollywoodian codes (Bouko 2014). It is notably interesting to notice that the building of this story, which indeed aims at a dramatic climax, can be divided according to Aristotle's three acts theory, which Hollywood script consultant Linda Seger preconizes (1992).

We had already mentioned the device's transparency in the harmonisation of the photographs in the Léon Vivien case. At diegetic level, Vivien and Castel's comments contribute to the construction of the narrative world by placing images in the space and time of the fiction, without taking account of their indexical nature.

While the simultaneous narration gives the impression of current reality, even a century later, and thus has connotations of access to reality, the deictic signs themselves constitute 'indexes

of fictionality' (Schaeffer quoted in Jost 2004: 57, our translation): in a story about the First or Second World Wars, indicators such as 'now', 'tonight' or 'tomorrow' can only refer to a fictional original enunciator which itself refers to a past narrative. Moreover, the unique mechanism of social networks superimposes itself here: the characters' messages resemble posts published by our friends and lend themselves to an 'authenticating' interpretation. Various procedures and effects, with contradictory aims, are at work here, encouraging interpretation on a number of different levels.

3. Conclusion

We have seen that there are many possible ways of bringing distant conflicts to life for (young) internet users through the intermediary of social networks and that they enjoy undeniable advantages; Facebook's potential for proximity and interaction is just one example.

Via a knowing blend of historical fact and fiction, the Vivien, Castel and Suzon tales prioritized emotion and united fans in an *empathic experience* of the war. In doing so, the creators of this experience on Facebook in some ways pay homage to the soldiers' subjectivity. To some extent, they transpose the principles of the *New History* to this docufiction: 'creating an empathy with the past is surely at least as, if not more important, than any flawed attempt to resurrect the past under the belief that it comes back to us as it really was.' (Munslow 2003: 147)

Having said this, docufictions on the internet can confuse internet users as to the nature of the enunciation; indeed they sometimes believe fictional and mythical tales of conflict to be genuine accounts transposed on the Web. Our semiopragmatic analysis, based on Jost and

Hanot's models, has allowed us to consider the four dimensions of these docufictions (profilmic, plastic, iconic and diegetic) in which *fiction exploits the characteristics of non-fiction*, in line with Lioult's hypothesis. As we have seen, the extent to which it is used varies according to the different docufictions.

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